

## CHILD DEVELOPMENT

As sure as prehistoric fish grew legs  
and sauntered off the beaches into forests,  
working up some irregular verbs for their  
first conversation, so three-year-old children  
enter the phase of name-calling.

Every day a new one arrives and is added  
to the sequence. You Dumb Goosehead,  
You Big Sewerface, You Poop-on-the-Floor  
(a kind of Navaho ring to that one)  
they yell from knee level, their little mugs  
flushed with challenge.  
Nothing Dr. Johnson would bother repeating  
in a pub, but then the toddlers are not trying  
to devastate some fatuous Enlightenment hack.

Just trying to torment their fellow squirts  
or going after the attention of the giants  
way up there with their cocktails and bad breath  
talking baritone nonsense to other giants,  
waiting to call them names after thanking  
them for a lovely party and hearing the door close.

Big people save their open name-calling  
for things: an errant hammer, tire chains,  
a receding train missed by sweaty seconds,

though they know in their adult hearts,  
even as they threaten to banish Timmy to bed  
for his appalling behavior,  
that their bosses are Big Fatty Stupids,  
their wives are Dopey Dopeheads  
and that they themselves are now and forever  
Mr. Sillypants.